I

Edward sat sulking, staring blankly at the headstone of his brother as the sun fell, pacifying himself with the rape of a once-long cigar. Alone in a chapel cemetery, his compatriots left almost an hour ago, clueless of what to do with himself now. The mountain wind gently blew cool and wispy around him.

“Still hanging on my friend?” Ed heard after a hand pat his shoulder.

“Quit torturing yourself, Will will always be here, he wouldn't want you moping over him like this, everyone's waiting for you at the glass house.”

Amidst madness, the prospect of returning to nostalgic debaucheries was an appealing respite from reality. Edward rose and spat on the ground, placing one hand on the buckle of his gun belt.

“Give me a drink,” He said sternly. The other man obliged, reaching in his jacket and handing over a flask, Ed took a glug and poured some over the freshly buried soil.

“Things will never be the same without him, Paul.”

Paul glanced over the grave as he was given back the flask, nodding in agreement, Ed discarded the end of his cigar. Without speaking they left together, leaving the grounds and walking through town to the riverside, arriving at a small decrepit factory where Edward, William, Paul, and other childish rabble would headquarters their chicanery when they were younger. The inside was dusty and the violet sky barely illuminated the interior through half-smashed windows, a few old industrial furnaces lined the walls, and containers full of glassware could be found as well as smashed remains that fell victim to the boy's roughness. A couple of tables with chairs were set in the middle, each with a lamp, and several men familiar to Edward were dotted around them. What ensued was a night of smoking, playing cards, and belligerent drunkenness, although this wasn't enough to distract Ed from himself.

“I can't stand this waiting around, like a faggot waiting to be burned.” He said, ringing his fingers on the table.

“Relax, and let us drink to the memory of your brother,” Paul responded.

“Relax for what? His blood is fresh and the bastards that killed him still walk. What we should be doing is preparing for war!”

“I feel the same way, Ed, but it was a dark night when Will died, how can we fight against what we do not know?”

Edward didn't want to hear it. This wasn't right, he thought. Somebody must pay for this crime.

“Anyway, if you are really itching to get your hands dirty, a fat target from upriver is staying at the saloon tonight, he just checked into the luxury room this morning. I can assume this interests you?” Paul queried. Without much thought, Ed gave a nod. Paul shuffled through his pocket before sliding over a metal key.

“Stay safe, and don't raise too much hell.”

Ed exhaled, grabbed the key, and got up in the same motion, heading for the door without saying a word. A quarter moon shone over the streets, guiding him toward his destination, the many people who recognized him on the way wouldn't dare speak to him, lest they wished to become caught in his wake. Ed slipped into an alley and arrived at the back steps of the saloon, no one was there, he reached into his fur coat and produced a black bandana which he draped above his nose over the mouth and tied behind his neck. The sound of piano and intoxicated revelry could be heard muffled behind the walls as he ascended upstairs and through the door. Entering, he stood in the intersection of a dimly lit L-shaped hallway evenly lined with numbered doors. Far down the corridor in front of him, he could see a few people conversing, behind them leading to the main bar room. Edward casually covered his face and turned right, hustling through the empty hallway to the very end where the luxury room was, he could hear muffled rustling and a man's voice behind the wall. Not wanting to waste time, Ed swiftly inserted the key into the lock, giving himself a moment to prepare with a breath, before unlocking and swinging through the door as he drew his revolver out of its holster. What he saw was a large man with a black waistcoat and slacks sitting on the edge of a bed and a woman in a plain-looking dress knelt in front of him with her head buried in his lap, both startled, she turned her head to Ed and shot up and the man did the same, almost tripping as he fixed his pants.

“If either of you yell I'll plug you both,” Edward said, cocking back his pistol and aiming it at them. The man was speechless for a moment before speaking.

“You son of a bitch-bastard have the gall to point a gun at me? You must not know who I am because you wouldn't be if you did.”

“Take everything out of his pockets,” Ed ordered the woman, motioning to her with his gun. With little thought, she followed and began to search the man's person.

“And you shut up and put your hands above your head,” Ed ordered the man, and they reluctantly did as told, peering down at the woman as she rummaged through his clothes.

“You whores are all the same, when this is over I'll have you thrown in jail as an accomplice while this one hangs.”

The woman finished, holding a cigarette case, gold pocket watch, and a small double-barreled derringer. Edward gestured her forward with his free hand and she hesitantly followed, quickly handing over the belongings before he stuffed them in his coat, sending her back with two flicks of his gun.

“Where's your wallet?” He said to the man, who responded by pointing to the nightstand next to the bed.

“In the drawer, it's a shame you won't get a chance to spend any of it, I'll make sure you and my belongings are safe in the sheriff's office by sunrise.”

“Didn't I tell you to shut your mouth!” Ed lambasted. The rich man dropped both his arms and began to rebuke back.

“And I'm telling you that you're dead, boy, you understand me? When you look out on the river and see those coal barges moving past every day do you know why? It's because of me goddamn it! I'm in charge of floating them down to the bay! You stupid sack of horse shit, you may as well be pointing a toy at me because I know a yellow-bellied punk when I see one! Now I'm tired of playing your silly game, so take my shit and get ou-!”

The awful crack of gunpowder pierced everyone's eardrums as the man was struck in the chest, toppling onto the floor. The woman screamed, but Ed ignored her, rushing to the nightstand and grabbing the black-leather wallet out of its compartment, by the time he turned around she was gone. Edward could not afford the time to think but knew certainly he could not exit the way he came in. He scanned the room and found a window, which he moved to and slid open before crawling through. For a moment he hung, then dropped from the frame, falling a story and breaking the fall adequately, although he rolled over and hurt his ankle. He got up and ran away into the night, paying no attention to the pain in his leg, following the woods on the outskirts of town down toward the riverside, carefully sneaking his way back to the glass house. Inside was black and only Paul remained, holding the only lantern.

“What did you do?” He asked.

“I shot him dead,” Ed responded, Paul seemed so concerned and flabbergasted that he was unsure of what to respond with.

“Why?”

“Because he deserved it.”

“You need to leave town, now.”

“I have nowhere to go, Paul.”

“You've lost your mind, Ed, the whole town will be swarming with law. That man you killed was big business, you just put us all in deep shit.”

“For all they'd know it could've been that group of bandits that killed Will, those reckless animals, maybe because of this they'll send some troopers up to hunt them all down. This could take care of all our problems.”

Paul was frustrated and could not strain himself any longer dealing with Edward's delusions, “Over in the corner there are stairs that lead up to an office, stay there tonight and I'll be back tomorrow, here, take this for now.”

Paul handed the lantern over to Ed and made his way to the door, he briefly paused and turned his head as if he was going to say something, but he didn't, leaving. Ed then searched for the steps and went up them, noticing the sharp pain in his ankle as his body's adrenaline decreased. He entered the musty office and sat on a wooden chair behind a large desk, placing his lantern on its top. Riffling his pockets he put the freshly poached loot amongst the light, admiring his bounty. He picked up the cigarette case, noticing it was silver, and inscribed with the image of a scantily clad woman, he opened it and grabbed a cigarette with his mouth, placing the pack back down before striking a match, burning the end of the stick, and inhaling the smoke of it's smolder. Edward then opened the wallet, counting the amount of currency inside.

II

Edward nursed a glass of whiskey, sitting with Paul at a barroom table in the saloon. The building had a tone of reserved liveliness that one would expect at noon. It had been a month since the night of that robbery, and the great hullabaloo that ensued seemed to have dissipated. Investigating officials relented, finding no strings to follow.

“See those men of cloth over there?” Paul said discreetly, pointing over to a table with three monks. A couple were drinking cups of beer, but the third, who had blonde hair, was not.

“What about them?” Edward queried, scratching his beard.

“They're from a monastery not far from here, they came to speak with Father Grosse about organizing an expedition to find some old church up the mountain. He asked me if I could be a bodyguard for them but I said no, I'm not risking my hide again as long as those marauders that killed Will are still out there.”

“You sound more like a coward every day, Paul, you talk with Grosse so much, maybe joining the church would be a more suitable occupation for you.”

“Being smart doesn't make me a coward, and it's far from you to know what suits me. Talk to the Father if you'd consider taking the job, no one else in this town will.”

Edward finished his drink, leaving the glass on the table. He got up and slipped on his coat, which was hung behind his chair.

“I'll do that.” He said, leaving.

Ed felt odd walking up the front steps of the chapel, he never had business being inside, even when Will died they did not have a service for him. When he entered there were two lanes of pews before him, at the end was a podium with a tall wooden cross behind it, and above a large circular stained glass window with a depiction of a dove in the middle. To Ed's right was a shrine to the Virgin Mary, a statue of her with many candles placed below, Father Grosse stood next to it while conversating with a very old monk. Ed approached them without courtesy.

“I hear you're in need of protection,” He said. Grosse and the monk turned to him with abrased looks.

“You must have heard this from Paul, yes we are looking for a hired gun, It's a shame your friend could not take the position,” Grosse said.

“A shame? You're lucky you waited until I came along, I'm two times the shootist than he is, ask anyone.”

“No need, your reputation precedes you.” The Father noted.

Ed squinted momentarily, looking over both men, then softly chuckled.

“Do you need me or not?” He said impatiently.

“Yes, we are looking for a ruin, and the trip there should take two or three days. Once we return you will be paid a hundred dollars.”

“And what do we expect to find there?”

“Nothing to be concerned about, that’s our business, your job is to keep us safe. We will leave at dawn tomorrow, meet us here in front of the chapel.”

“Are you sure we can trust this boy, Father Grosse?” The old monk interjected.

Ed darted his eyes at the monk, offended, but before he could retort the Father spoke.

“Worry not. Your brothers and I will be safe by the grace of God and Edward's gun at our side. I promise we all will return to you. Now, please see yourself out, Edward. We have preparations to make.”

Ed leered at the monk before leaving through the front door, spitting on the ground as he walked down the steps. It was a boring day before he returned to the glass house, there was no rational need for him to remain there, he got used to its mildew and thought it advantageous not having to pay rent. He had brought in a mattress on which to rest, and at night inundated himself asleep with liquor.

III

Birds chirped in the dim morning light. Edward walked up the road approaching the chapel to see Father Grosse and the three monks. The blonde monk was tightening cargo straps on a pack mule. Ed joined the group without salutations.

“She's all set, are we ready to go?” The blonde asked.

Grosse nodded, and the band began their journey, walking out of town. As they traveled, the monks made sparse discussions amongst themselves and with Father Grosse, while Edward remained silent, sympathizing with the mule as they were both dragged along. Ed carried his own supplies, bringing a sling bag with him. They all walked together for several hours before stopping to rest underneath a growth of pine trees, Edward sat down leaning against a trunk. He took a swig of a stout whiskey bottle he brought as the blonde monk approached him, holding a small fold of cloth in one hand.

“Care for a piece?” He said, pinching and offering a wide strip of beef jerky from the cloth.

Ed's pride wished to refuse it, but his lust could not deny accepting, setting his bottle aside and taking the jerky, shredding off bits of it with his teeth.

“My name is Caleb, and your name is Edward, correct?” the monk asked, but he received no response. He paused for a few seconds as Ed ate before continuing.

“With all due respect, I'd have to advise you not to drink, these mountains are perilous and we must all have our best wits about us.”

“You must be pretty dim to keep asking me things you already know the answer to or do all monks do that? Mind your own business and let me handle mine, the liquor keeps my head sharp.” Ed retorted.

“I hear you know these mountains well and your game is strong. I'm curious as to what kind of business you usually make out here,” Caleb said.

“Hunting, what else? The only other prospect is coal and anthracite, and I never was a miner.”

“I see, well don't get too comfortable, friend, I expect we will be leaving shortly.” Caleb declared, returning to the other monks. Ed's mind burned at the word ‘friend’ but he kept to himself, taking another sip of whiskey. The group resumed their journey, winding through roads and trails at the lead of Father Grosse. A considerable amount of time passed during which

Edward contemplated why exactly they were on this mission, no selfless pilgrimage could be worth the danger and that hundred dollars the father was willing to pay. He suspected there was something very valuable at their destination that the others didn't want him to know about, and this thought teased him. Time passed, and now they were moving through a rocky area with a clearing on one side and a veil of woods on the other. Ed looked out into the forest as they hiked and noticed a large shadow creeping through the brush out of the corner of his eye, he honed in his awareness while walking slower, making out the sounds of leaves rustling and twigs snapping next to them.

“Stop!” He shouted, and the group halted as he did.

“What is it?” Grosse said, approaching Edward, but he did not respond. Instead, he unholstered his gun and pointed it past the tree line.

“Come out now or I'll run you down!” He yelled, searching his eyes to find the stalker.

“Don't shoot!” Someone responded, sending up two hands from behind a bush. They stood up and stepped toward the trail. It was a young cowboy with a freckled face.

Ed grabbed the boy, confiscating their gun and dragging him by the collar out into the open.

“You must have a reason for following us,” he said to the stalker, who was sweaty and nervous, brewing an excuse.

“I keep my eye on everyone who passes through these parts, especially a queer posse such as yours.” They responded, their hands still raised at chest level.

Edward smacked the boy to the ground with his revolver, turning his attention towards the father.

“He must be working with bandits. We should kill him now and save us the trouble later,” He said.

“Regrettably, you are right, Edward. We can't risk him reporting back to whatever camp he's from,” the Father concurred.

“What is right? This man has done nothing yet but watch us, shooting him will only incite more bloodshed later, and frankly Father, I'm shocked that you would agree with such a notion. Sparing him is the Christian thing to do,” Caleb retorted, which conflicted Grosse.

“Do not lecture me on what is Christian, young Caleb, but maybe your way will work better. Letting him go will show we don't want to fight,” The Father conceded.

“And you tell them that, creep,” He said to the cowboy, who in return pressed his hands together as if praying in thanks, still sitting on the ground.

“You can't be serious. If we let him go now, it could jeopardize everything,” Ed argued to Grosse.

“My decision is made. Now run off, boy, before I change my mind,” the Father told the stalker, who got up and ran down the trail without saying a word.

The group continued until nightfall, unpacking their mule and camping on a low cliff edge. Edward spoke to no one, stirring about Grosse letting the cowboy go. He unrolled a thin bedroll, drank some whiskey, and rested, drifting to sleep and leaving the problem for tomorrow.

IV

William laughed with a bottle of beer in his hand, leaning on a wall outside behind the saloon.

“That old bastard was deaf, dumb, and blind. The sorry sack was dead drunk in his chair while I stripped his house from top to bottom. He barely had anything worth taking, though, just some cash and a few guns,” Edward continued, puffing on a cigarillo.

“If only the world were full of marks like that,” Will lamented.

“Everything is ours for the taking, we just need to work on our aim.”

“Amen to that,” Will said, raising his bottle, and taking a drink to Ed's statement.

The brothers hung idly, talking until Paul arrived.

“Are we ready? I brought our horses out front,” Paul asked.

Will nodded with a jaunty, ‘Let's go,’ finishing what little was left of his beer and throwing the glass aside. Ed tossed his cigarillo on the ground and followed suit. They joined together, mounting their horses and riding out of town into the night. William led the trio and held a bright lantern, galloping at a hustling pace. They winded through the wood and arrived at a bend in the road.

“Douse that light, they should be coming any minute now,” Paul said, and Will did as he suggested.

Ed and Will dismounted and rounded their horses behind a fallen tree. Paul remained perched on his steed in the open, tying a bandana into a mask over his mouth and unholstering a repeater carbine, brandishing it vigilantly. The brothers crouched down, eyes glinting in the moonlight like lions, Ed took a tin of chewing tobacco from his pocket and packed some in his lip, handing it to Will who did the same. It wasn't long until a glow shone creeping from the distance, making its way along the road toward the gang, the sounds of hoofs and a bustling stagecoach becoming apparent. William spit on the ground before producing a large square of cloth, which he tied around his forehead, covering his whole face, with a generous slit cut out for his eyes. They waited with guns drawn in anticipation as their prey rounded the corner, while Edward slipped on a bandana just like Paul did. Will stood up, moving to the side of Paul's horse and motioning his brother to follow.

“After you,” Will signaled Paul, who clicked his spurs and launched, rifle raised, beginning the confrontation.

The coach was driven by a man and guarded by another who sat beside him, carrying a double-barreled shotgun. The guard noticed Paul's advance and lifted his weapon, preparing to fire. He was swiftly shot in the head by Paul, who then slowed to a halt and pointed his gun at the coach driver.

“Hands raised!” Paul ordered the man, who then did so, submitted by fear.

Will marched to the carriage door and flung it open. Ed looked in, seeing a wealthy-dressed man and his wife, both frightened by the ordeal.

“Search the luggage in the back and I'll take care of these two,” Will told Ed, who followed his direction and moved to loosen the cargo straps. Before starting he noticed a lamplight shifting behind the trees and around the bend, coming from the same direction the coach did, which startled and stopped Ed.

“Somethings coming!” He shouted, backing up.

Very quickly, two horsemen arrived. A man held the light, wearing a hefty bandolier and wielding a high-caliber bolt-action rifle. The person behind him was shrouded by darkness. Tension stole speech as every party evaluated the situation. Will made first play, grabbing the wealthy man's wife and taking cover behind her, pointing his revolver at the new arrival.

“Leave now or I'll kill you all!” He yelled, the woman's husband protested but was ignored.

The horseman smirked, hanging the lamp on his saddle and turning his rifle towards Will. An incredible explosion erupted from the firearm, blasting a bullet through the woman's body into Will's, and they both dropped. For a moment the world muted, Edward was deafened, his mind flooded with the awful reality of what had just occurred. The slick sound of a sliding bolt peaked his awareness, yet the inevitable truth of death paralyzed his body.

“Sarah!” The wealthy man yelped, bursting out of the carriage door.

Absorbing the state of his wife, he hastily grabbed Will's gun and pointed it at the rifleman, in turn being executed himself, his head obliterated. The coachman dropped his hands and pulled out his revolver, hoping to capitalize upon the chaos, but was shot by Paul. Within this series of events, Ed had regained motor consciousness, cocking his gun and aiming it at William's killer. A round cast from the shadowed horseman narrowly missed Edward's head and splintered the corner of the coach's cabin, shocking him into retreating to Paul. Paul fired thrice from the hip at the rifleman, striking his horse's head and collapsing them. He saw Ed

approaching and reached out his hand, hoisting them up to sit behind himself. The two sped off as bullets hurled past them, eventually getting away from the conflict. They rode for minutes in a silent composure, but it wasn't long until Edward started weeping, it was the first time Paul ever saw him cry.

V

“We're preparing to leave, Ed,” He heard Father Grosse say, his leg tapped by their boot.

He opened his eyes and rose irritated, the mule was packed and all the monks were ready to depart. Ed lazily rolled up his bed and grabbed his bottle, stuffing them in his bag. They continued their journey, faithfully traveling along the same trail. By the afternoon they found themselves walking along a creekside, the rolling water complimented by a gay whistling from Caleb. The road turned into a simple old bridge that crossed the stream and led to a path between two rock formations. Ed became nervous as they passed an abandoned wagon and were about to go over the bridge, he saw a figure rise on top of the rocks to their right, and quickly after, a familiar explosion rang out. The figure blew open the head of the monk's mule, it was the man who killed Will, sporting the same long rifle.

“Nobody moves an inch!” They bellowed, and three other armed outlaws climbed into view, supporting the bandoliered man. One of them was the young stalker from before, who stood on a rock on the opposite side of the trail.

“Which one of you is the leader of this outfit?” He said, cocking another bullet into the chamber of his gun.

“You may refer to me as Father Grosse, and I am leading this band of holy brothers through the mountain.”

A hoarse chuckle bubbled from the rifleman, and his constituents did similarly, except the freckled cowboy, who stood anxiously.

“Okay then, Father, and I'm sure you'll be delighted to call me respectfully by my Christian name, Richard. Now, why do you think your mule is dead on the ground and not all of you?”

“Because you are a cruel marauder,” Grosse responded. Richard tsked, continuing his line of questioning.

“I'm disappointed in you, I'd expect a man of your standing to be wiser in these matters. No, it is because I'm merciful, and if you want me to continue being so you will answer my next question truthfully. What business do you have traveling through my mountain?”

Grosse glanced back at Caleb and the other monks with a look of warning that Ed could recognize, before answering Richard.

“That is only for the church to know. Now let us take our belongings and pass through; this trouble doesn't need to escalate further.”

“That sounded dangerously close to a threat, Father,” Richard warned.

“Pardon me for this offense, Lord,” Grosse declared, drawing a snub-nosed pistol from his black jacket and firing it at Richard's gang while moving behind the old wagon. The monks similarly drew revolvers from their robes, shooting and ducking with the Father while Caleb quickly grabbed something long wrapped in a bed sheet from the dead mule. Ed and the posse made it behind cover under a hail of bullets from the bandits, Caleb unraveled the sheet and revealed a repeater rifle, handing it to Grosse. Each member took potshots as the bandits gradually crept down from the rocks, trying to angle a better position to hit the holy men. Stress mounted as the wagon wore down from the perforating onslaught and Richard's gang closed in. Ed noticed the awkward standing of the boy stalker, they were cocky but rigid, sending out shots wildly with little awareness. Slipping his revolver past cover, Ed shot the cowboy in his left shoulder, twirling them around to the ground.

“Art!” Richard yelled, slinging his rifle. He dashed across the trail and up the rocks to the stalker's aid.

Richard unholstered a revolver and hoisted Art, carrying him down the trail and ordering his partners to follow. They all retreated while covering fire. The forest calmed and after the skirmish ended Grosse and his group stepped out into the open, collecting themselves.

“Poor girl,” Caleb commented, lamenting the mule. Ed gazed into the blooming wound of its head for a moment before being revolted, directing his attention towards Grosse.

“What now?” Edward asked.

“We take what we can carry and continue to our destination. I'll hold onto this rifle for now, we must stay alert and ready at all times,” the Father ordered.

The monks scavenged supplies into bags, mostly food, and everyone carried on. They walked until nightfall and made camp in a small clearing, once they set up, Ed gave some thought to the day. He was surprised by Grosse's tenacity and willingness to kill, and how the monks were also so eager to fight. They were masking their true intentions and firearms under a pious demeanor, what else could they be hiding? The Father wants little known about the point of their mission, but Ed could deduce that what they are looking for is invaluable. He decided then and there, sitting on his bedroll, that whatever they were looking for he would steal for

himself and scalp anything else worth taking from this reckless adventure. He picked up his bottle of liquor and meditated momentarily, deciding to pack it away, his mind ran with dreams of opportunity as he laid down and fell asleep.

VI

Edward woke up, the morning light dappling through tree leaves onto the campsite. He propped himself with his shoulder, rubbing his head momentarily before intuitively feeling for his gun, which was missing from its holster. He turned over to see Caleb sitting on a stone holding the stolen revolver. They were alone amongst the rest of the band's unpacked belongings. Ed sat up towards Caleb who then cocked his pistol, pointing it.

“I'm sorry It has to be this way, but a good brother follows orders, I'm sure you must understand,” the blonde said with an insecurity in his voice.

Ed sighed, casually grabbing hold of his bag.

“All I ask is that you let me have one last drink, that is my dying wish,” he pleaded, Caleb thought for a moment before conceding.

“It's a sorry way to leave this earth, but fine, and don't dare try anything else out or you won't have your parting glass.”

Ed reached inside and paused, feeling a sheathed hunting knife in his sack. He pondered over it, debating different options of deception for escape. Relenting, he decided to take out the bottle of liquor, tossing the bag aside and drinking a heaping shot of whiskey. He held the bottle in his hand, resting it on his knee. He grinned while looking up at Caleb's impressionable eyes.

“Is this what our lives have come to? You executing me, an unarmed man who only wished to help? How can a decent person like yourself stomach such a thing?” Ed jeered.

“Grosse told us about you, how you're a robber and a thief. He said you killed an important man but no one could prove it. You upset many people and we've taken the job of obliging them, this isn't personal,” Caleb confessed.

“You're right, this isn't personal. Killing me will only weigh on your soul, and when judgment comes there will be no justifying what you have done. I will be a martyr and you will be damned with me,” Ed said, staring straight through his stolen gun at the blonde.

“But God's mercy…” Caleb rambled, conflicted.

“Have mercy on me, friend, I beg you for both our sakes.”

Ed tried to present himself as genuinely as possible without exposing his devious tactic. Caleb put his palm on his chin, deeply considering what he was doing. Suddenly, a distant gunshot broke the silence between the two, causing the monk to stand up in alarm. Edward took the chance to lunge forward, throwing his whiskey bottle at Caleb and striking their right

cheekbone, tumbling them to the ground. Rushing over Ed confiscated his revolver and smacked them in the head with its grip, knocking Caleb unconscious. A couple more bangs fired off, and Ed began following its sound, jogging through the underbrush. The shots were sporadic but consistent, growing louder as he ran. After a few minutes, he arrived at the edge of the ruin grounds, the plot of land was depressed and surrounded by a hill. A graveyard overgrown with tall grass wrapped around the decrepit wooden church which seemed dangerously close to caving in. The two monks, one of them wielding the repeater rifle, hid behind tombstones while in a shootout with Richard and two of his men, who were on higher ground shrouded in the foliage of the tree line. While remaining hidden, Ed noticed that neither side seemed to be making much progress in the battle. He crouched and stepped forward carefully to get to a good vantage upon Richard, getting closer to the edge of the lull he went prone and crawled under bushes, keeping his chest to the ground. His eyes lit like a snake, pulling forth his revolver and positioning it as perfectly as possible, eager to end the outlaw's game and avenge William. As the bandit brazenly stood one foot on a rock and aimed down at the monks he was stuck by Ed's bullet in the chest, causing him to fold and collapse off the ledge. The couple of his men returned fire, shooting through leaves and branches around Ed as he crawled back. The monk with their rifle took a chance and stood up, spraying three bullets and killing one of the outlaws. Edward circled toward the holy brothers as the last member of Richard's gang shot back in retaliation, unfortunately missing and only cracking a headstone before being shredded with gunfire between the pair of monks.

“Caleb, is that you?” One of them called out, looking above into the trees.

Ed emerged from the wood, blasting the repeater monk and killing them instantly. Right as he recocked the hammer of his revolver Ed was shot in the left femur, sending him tumbling down into the grass. He laid limp on his side in shock, feigning death as the monk approached. When the brother crept near enough Ed tilted his head and slipped his weapon through the other arm in a subtle manner, pulling the trigger and quickly killing them. He rolled over and breathed deeply, letting the weeds and clear sky envelop him, throughout the mayhem of this morning he now had a brief moment of meditation. However, it wasn't long before his body beckoned him to attend to the stabbing pain in his side, he brushed a hand over the wound and it stung horribly, electrifying his nervous system. He collected his mind and remembered this journey's point, the treasure Father Grosse was so keen on finding. Edward holstered his gun and forced himself up,

shuffling along and stumbling on his weak leg. He caught himself on a stone cross and looked down at one of the dead monks, reaching over and picking up their repeater, using it as a cane. Hobbling to the church, he noticed its white paint which was severely weather-worn and stripped, nature replacing large patches with moss. The wood was rotted out, causing the structure to lean sideways drastically. The front had a large glassless window frame above the entranceway, its broken door lying on the ground nearby. Edward entered the shadowed sanctum, seeing Grosse fiddling with an ornamental box on the floor, the window shone a beam of sunlight along the pewed corridor to a podium, of which the Father was below. Ed flipped up his rifle, propping his body on the doorway and racking its lever, staying vigilant for any sudden movements from the priest.

"So, I can assume since we're both here this means everyone else is dead?" Grosse asked, standing up with the box under his left arm.

"You'd be correct, though Caleb is just taking a nap. I know that you tried to have him kill me," Ed responded, adjusting his posture.

Grosse glanced at the box, exhaling.

"If you expect any apology from me you won't find it, you deserve to die. I deeply regret that I did not prepare thoroughly enough for this mission, and my trusting of that juvenile to take your life has led to ruin. For that, I will forever have to beg the forgiveness of God. But heed these words, Edward, by my hand and the will of Christ you will not leave this church alive."

Ed snickered, reveling in the power he finally had over the Father.

"Then draw your pistol, you foolish bastard, and let me teach you that lead is more powerful than any sermon you could spill from your cheap mouth."

Grosse's eyes squinted in the bright light as he readied himself, slowly reaching his hand into his jacket. Ed's eyes were wide open and punctual, his emotion high from toying with his prey. The Father blinked and pulled his gun, but not quickly as Ed raised his repeater, shooting them in the heart. Grosse dropped the box and clenched his wound, falling to his knees momentarily then capitulating, dead. Excitedly, Edward caned to the box and knelt, tossing his rifle aside. The box was carved with a cross emblem on its lid, he opened it with wild expectations to reveal a simple wooden chalice laid in a bed of red felt which lined the container's interior. Anger and frustration flushed through him and he threw the open box across the church, crashing it into a dark corner of the room. Ed sat with a hand on his forehead, his

wounded leg outstretched, ‘could this truly have all been for nothing?’ He thought. Seconds passed before a shadow projected over him, he turned to see a silhouette standing in the doorframe, whose one arm was slung in a bandage and the other aimed a revolver.

“You killed my uncle!” They cried in a choked voice, it was the stalker, Art.

Ed was defeated, having no more fight left in him, like a wounded horse fated to be put down, he hung his head and waited.

“Say something!” Art cried again, but Ed did not say anything, a final insolent resistance against a world by which he felt oppressed.

Edward was sniped in the back of the head, a clean shot through which exploded the skull. The blood of him and Grosse pooled together on the dirty floorboards as Art stomped off, dust dancing in the ladder of light cast over the soul drained bodies. A robin fluttered in, perching themselves inside the window, darting their head curiously.

Epilogue

The exhilarating snap of Will's bow mesmerized Ed, watching as an arrow flew through the air and penetrated an unsuspecting doe's breast. It called out and bucked, jolting away deeper into the temperate jungle. William and Edward were young adolescents still green in their horns, learning to survive and provide for themselves. Ed's older brother clicked his tongue twice, signaling the start of their pursuit on the deer's trail.

“Is it a boy or a girl?” Ed asked, walking along with Will.

“A girl,” they responded matter of factly.

“Isn't it wrong to kill a girl?”

“You take what you can get when you have the chance, it won't matter what it is when we eat.”

Ed accepted this conclusion, his mind wandering to other more poignant questions he had not asked his brother before.

“Do you remember my father at all?”

“I was only a babe and wouldn't have seen him either way. Works on the coal barges I think, probably still does. Not like my father, he was a drifter, dead now I hope.”

Ed watched the step of his feet, letting Will guide him through the brush.

“Did you love our mama?”

“Our mama was a whore, but she was a good whore. She did what she could to raise us, and we owe her everything for that. One day we'll be rich and live in a big house somewhere far away, and Mama will be smiling down on us from heaven, knowing all her hard work paid off.”

Edward smiled at that thought, dreaming of the luxury that could be, but his daydream was cut short by the shrill bleating of that doe. The brothers approached the deer which writhed on the ground and William unsheathed his hunting knife, preparing to slaughter it, but he stopped.

“You do it,” he demanded, flipping his blade and offering the hilt to Ed.

“I don't want to,” they responded.

“Well, you're gonna have to learn to, and it's best if you did now.”

Ed accepted the knife and crouched beside the doe, its flailing legs disturbing. He held its shoulder and pressed the knife's edge onto its throat, the animal's bulging and confused eyes seemed almost human. He pulled his tool back, slicing the neck open, killing the helpless mother.